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MAY MEETING, 1887.

THE stated meeting was held on the 12th instant at three P. M., the chair being occupied by Dr. ELLIS.

The record of the previous meeting was read by the Recording Secretary.

The additions by gift to the Library were reported by the Librarian.

Ernst Curtius, of Berlin, was chosen an Honorary Member of the Society; and John A. Doyle, Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, was elected a Corresponding Member.

The PRESIDENT then said: —

There has been put into my hands since I came into this hall the following Resolve, which has passed both branches of the Legislature, and now awaits the action of the Governor. I have been asked to bring it to the notice of the Society.

Resolve providing for the Erection of a Memorial to Crispus Attucks, Samuel Gray, Jonas Caldwell, Samuel Maverick, and Patrick Carr.

Resolved, That the Governor and Council be, and they are hereby, authorized and requested to cause to be erected in some public place in the city of Boston a suitable memorial or monument to the memory of Crispus Attucks, Samuel Gray, Jonas Caldwell, Samuel Maverick, and Patrick Carr, who were killed by British soldiers in the streets of Boston, on the fifth day of March, in the year seventeen hundred and seventy, upon the occasion known as the "Boston Massacre;" also to cause suitable headstones to be placed at the graves of the said persons, where their locations can be ascertained, the amount to be expended under this resolve not to exceed ten thousand dollars.

The words "so-called," so generally used in connection with the lamentable incident which occurred in State Street, March 5, 1770, designating a "Massacre," are generally understood, when attached to a person or an event, as carrying with them the suggestion of *mis-called*, as supposititious, or apologetic. So that incident, when popularly spoken of as a

“so-called massacre,” leaves us to infer that the word is not used with strict propriety. The incident, as an event in our history, is appropriately, if not adequately, commemorated by a bronze tablet on a building near the spot, and by a radiated pavement upon it where the victims fell. The Commonwealth has never as yet raised any monumental memorial of a person or of an event in its history. The Resolve proposes that the State Treasury should now, for the first time, pay its highest monumental honors to commemorate those victims. We may well pause upon that proposition. Who were those victims, and what made them victims?

The oppressive measures of the British Government at our Revolutionary period had engaged opposition here in two forms, — the one of peaceful, earnest, patriotic protest and resistance by our wise and resolute popular leaders; the other of riots and mobs, resulting in the destruction of private property and in personal insults to officials. To overawe the latter, foreign soldiers had been stationed in the town, provoking by their presence and behavior the just indignation of the inhabitants. These hated agents of arbitrary measures of government, instead of securing good order and helping to suppress riots, were the exciting cause of new riots. In one of these a squad of the military, acting under the commands of their officers, were exasperated by the threats, gibes, insults, and missiles of a mob of these rioters, and discharged their guns into it in self-defence. Those who fell in this hap-hazard conflict came to be described as the victims of a “massacre.” The soldiers were indicted for murder. Notwithstanding the hot passions of the time, and the intensity of the indignation against them, they were defended in the judicial proceedings against them by two of the foremost patriots, and acquitted by a Massachusetts jury. The occasion was commemorated for several successive years by an oration condemning the presence and denouncing the wrong of a standing army in civil affairs in a time of peace.

Mr. WASHBURN remarked that, assuming the voice of scholars to be unanimous in the declaration that these men were not acting in the character of patriots, but of rioters, and “died as the fool dieth,” he would call attention more particularly to the parliamentary attitude of this question.

He said that he had no doubt that a thorough scholar in Massachusetts history, who could have commanded the ear of the House of Representatives, would in a single speech have convinced them of the impropriety of passing this Resolve; and he referred to a former experience of his own in the case of Roger Williams. He was of the opinion, however, that, the Resolve having passed both branches of the Legislature, it would be very difficult to get a vote for its recall from the Governor. He also believed that a resolution of this kind, without the appointment of a committee to wait on the Governor, would serve only to put this Society right; but that if a committee, of whom the President of this Society should be the head, should carry with them such a resolution, they might prevail on the Executive to interpose his veto, provided that he, as a politician, was not more likely to be influenced by the negroes and the cheaper politicians than by the educated men. The only thing to be done was to pass the resolution and appoint the committee. The Society then would have performed its duty; but at this stage, and with the pressure which would probably be exerted by the promoters of the Resolve, the result must be very doubtful.

Mr. HILL suggested that either house could ask that the bill might be returned.

Dr. PAIGE said he thought there was another side of the question. As nearly as he could recollect the published accounts, the people of Boston, instead of denouncing the slaughtered men as a riotous mob, unworthy of common sympathy, represented them as perhaps misguided patriots, who had lost their lives in the cause of liberty; and the whole town rendered such funeral honors as had seldom been witnessed. Moreover, some of the foremost citizens were selected, from year to year, to keep the memory of that event green by public orations. It was long since he read those orations; but he could not recall a single disparaging remark concerning the victims. In his opinion the erection of a monument to their memory would indicate no greater disrespect to Quincy and John Adams, who professionally defended the British soldiers, than a refusal would indicate towards Warren and Samuel Adams, whose patriotism is not doubted, and who quite as earnestly and emphatically justified resistance to military oppression. He supposed that before the Declaration of

Independence all forcible opposition to British authority was technically rebellious and treasonable. It is somewhat difficult to draw the line between the promiscuous pelting of the soldiers with ice and clubs in State Street, and the unorganized skirmish in Lexington and Cambridge, five years later, or the more orderly but illegally organized struggle on Bunker Hill, where Warren himself lost his life. While we canonize the martyrs who perished in those later contests, and erect magnificent monuments in honor of them, it seems scarcely consistent to refuse recognition to the humble men whose death was followed by such important results. Having this view of the case, he could not vote in favor of the resolution under consideration; yet, as there seemed to be a desire that the action should be unanimous, he would not vote against it, notwithstanding he so strongly doubted its propriety and expediency.

Dr. PEABODY expressed his surprise that the affair of the 5th of March should ever have been regarded as other than a riot for which there was no justifiable motive, in which the so-called victims were the aggressors, and were killed by the soldiers in self-defence. He said that in the orations delivered annually in commemoration of that event, no claim of patriotic purpose was made for the men who were slain, the whole *gravamen* of the vehement rhetoric bearing upon the fact that these were British soldiers quartered in Boston in what was claimed to be a time of peace. The orators in every instance forgot to say that it was the previous ascendancy of mob-law in Boston that led to the quartering of soldiers in the town.

Mr. GOODELL declared his agreement with the President. He said if the purpose of the monument were simply to indicate the place of burial, he should make no objection to it; but a monument to perpetuate the fame of rioters was preposterous. The proposal of such a thing could only spring from a misconception of the true ground for making the event memorable; and he concurred with what Dr. Peabody had said as to the position taken by the Boston orators, and all the most respected of contemporary patriots, — that the withdrawal of the troops, in consequence of the bloodshed of March 5, 1770, and not the conduct or character of the rioters, was what they intended to celebrate. He thought the resolve might be recalled, and a further hearing granted, and thus the

State saved from a worse than wasteful outlay. He gave an account of his interview with the Governor, and the chairmen of the respective branches of the Legislature, of the Joint Standing Committee on Expenditures, which reported the resolve, and said that he should endeavor to secure a further hearing on the expediency of the resolve, and hoped the Society would be represented on that occasion.¹

Dr. DEANE said that the attack on the soldiers was conducted by a mere mob, inspired by no elevated sentiments, and fatally bent on mischief. A few of their number, fortunately for their fame, were killed, and for that reason they became martyrs. If they had not been killed, even the names of those few would never have been preserved to the present day. Thus the martyr's crown is placed upon the brow of the vulgar ruffian. The soldiers acted in self-defence. Judge Trowbridge's charge to the jury is the most impartial history of the affair we can read. The jury did their duty nobly under the most trying circumstances, and substantially acquitted the soldiers who were indicted for murder.

Mr. WASHBURN moved that a committee be appointed, of which the President should be the chairman, to present to the authorities at the State House the views of this Society in such manner as they may deem best.

The PRESIDENT asked to be excused from serving on the Committee. He said that he had been informed of some of the influences under which the legislative measure had been carried, and that his views on the subject would be fully met by the motion suggested. "When, at some future time," he continued, "as will surely be the case, the motives and influences which affect our legislative action, wholly independent of the merits of the objects acted upon, shall be exposed to critical questioning, this lavish use of the public money for the purpose proposed may be challenged. Then it may be a satisfaction to some to be reminded by our records that we expressed in temperate and fitting terms our regret at this action of our Legislature."

Dr. EVERETT then offered the following Resolution, which was adopted:—

¹ Mr. Goodell published in the "Boston Daily Advertiser" of June 3, 1887, an elaborate article on "The Boston Massacre," which was afterwards separately printed. — EDS.

Resolved, That the members of the Massachusetts Historical Society have heard with regret the action of the General Court in passing a resolution for a monument to Crispus Attucks, Samuel Gray, Jonas Caldwell, Samuel Maverick, and Patrick Carr, who were killed in Boston on the 5th of March, 1770. While greatly applauding the sentiment which erects memorials to the heroes and martyrs of our annals, the members of the Society believe that nothing but a misapprehension of the event styled the "Boston Massacre" can have led to classifying these persons with those entitled to grateful recognition at the public expense.

A Committee, consisting of Dr. Peabody, Messrs. Goodell, Washburn, E. J. Lowell, and McCleary, was then appointed to present the foregoing Resolve to the Governor.

Mr. WINSOR read a letter from Professor Joy, now in Munich, respecting the history of a very large number of papers of Timothy Pickering, amassed while he was Quartermaster-General in the Revolution, and containing many letters of Washington, Hamilton, and other distinguished persons, which were purchased by the Government and taken to Washington in 1873, where they are preserved apart from what has been supposed to be the complete collection of Pickering papers, now in the Library of this Society.

The following Committees were then appointed for the ensuing year : —

On publishing the Proceedings, Edward J. Young, Clement Hugh Hill, and Alexander McKenzie.

On the Library, Samuel A. Green, Mellen Chamberlain, and John D. Washburn.

On the Cabinet, Fitch Edward Oliver, Edward J. Young, and Robert C. Winthrop, Jr.

On Finance, Charles Deane, John Lowell, and William Everett.

To approve Bills, Charles Deane.